



Body Programme: *Reasons for being & needing to be overweight*

Introduction

There isn't a single woman I've worked with who doesn't have a difficult relationship with her body shape size and weight. Regardless of their actual shape size and weight. But before getting into the individual psychological and emotional issues that may need to be explored kindly and with curiosity, there is a socio-cultural soapbox I refuse to pass by. By now we are all – I really hope - aware that our culture is shocking when it comes to being bombarded with images of unattainable ideals from an early age and at every turn. In our homes, on social media, on buses. A certain size, shape, weight and set of proportions (and usually age too) – naturally attainable and sustainable by x miniscule percentage of the population – are endlessly equated with happiness, wealth, romantic partnership, career success and pretty much any commodity you care to think of.

So the first thing I want to encourage you to do, if you spend any of your time in distress about your physical body, is to reflect on the aggressive conditioning you've been subjected to and see how you feel and what you think about that. See whether that changes anything at all about how much time you want and need to spend either working on your appearance or exploring personal psychological issues to do with that precious body of yours that has been carrying you around since before you were born. Read Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, or check out the US-based [Miss Representation](#) movement and film. Because it might be time to get angry.

But if after that exploration you are still clear that your weight is medically unhealthy for you, the read on. If this is the case and yet you can't lose a healthy amount using a sensible combination of increased exercise and diet adjustment, then it's possible that there is something else going on. Something at an unconscious psychological or emotional level that is coming between you and improved health.

If you suspect or are even curious whether this is the case, then the starting point is to bring into consciousness what is currently unconscious. The theory being that the power of the unconscious is great, and that whilst a belief or drive is unconscious it will continue to interfere with any conscious choices to the contrary. Bringing a belief or motivation into the light and "owning" it robs it of a great deal of its power to affect our behaviour. And if we can discover what our unconscious has been trying to do for us by keeping us overweight, then we might work out a way to achieve the same goal without using an overweight body. And of course we also might also realise that the belief is out of date.

The first part of this resource is designed to provide a set of questions for you to reflect on deeply. There's no reason you can't do this privately on your own. I suggest you take it slowly, maybe buy a new journal devoted just to this exploration, and take it one question at a time. Maybe one question a week. And you might consider doing this with another friend who struggles with the same things, or even a small group of friends, so that you can support one another and share your insights. If you're in therapy, you might want to talk to your therapist about the programme and use the therapy space to explore what comes up for you.

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Part 1: Why can't I lose weight / why do I feel like I do about my body?

As you consider these questions, don't restrict your reflections to your thinking head. Try to broaden your awareness to what sensations arise in your physical body, what memories, or images, spontaneously present themselves. Even if you don't understand what those things are trying to communicate to you. Tell your whole organism that you are listening to all its ways of communicating with you. Make a note of your emotional reactions, your emotions, images, and associations. Draw rough pictures to represent feelings or sensations.

The Questions

- ❖ Do I believe I need protection?

Against what? When was this true? Is it true now? Are there other ways of protecting myself? What might they be? Do those other ways of protecting myself frighten me or seem much harder? Might I be able to learn slowly? What does feeling safe feel like and can I imagine in?

- ❖ Why might I need to hide who I am?

What are the "bad" things I am so afraid of being discovered as? How did I come to believe that about myself? How old was I when I started to feel afraid of people knowing what I was really like? Can I picture that kid? What did they need someone to tell them? What is it like, feeling and thinking like that about myself? Is there any chance it isn't true at all, or isn't entirely true? Can I own consciously that I'm afraid of being seen so that I don't need my body to express that fear for me? What are the "good" things I'm not allowed to be seen as? Why? Would someone have been threatened by my gifts? Can I start to experiment with showing trusted people more of who I am – the good and the imperfect?

- ❖ Do I have a longing to be seen and taken into account?

In what ways was I not seen, by whom? What was that like? Who does see me now? In what ways do I fail to see / know myself now? What stops me? How can I start to see and know myself better now? How can I see and know my inner child in particular?

- ❖ Do I need space?

In what ways was I robbed of space, and by whom? What was that like for me? How does it feel now when someone is stealing my space in some way? How else can I claim space for myself now if I didn't use my body to do it? What stops me? Can I imagine the feeling of spaciousness?

- ❖ Am I secretly afraid of the consequences of losing weight?

What have I told myself I will do / will happen "when I'm slim again" and am I scared of it? Am I scared of still failing and having nothing else to blame it on? Can I make a deal with my body that I will not make it do those things just because it weighs less? Can I promise my body I will find healthy creative ways of protecting it from feared consequences of weighing less?

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- ❖ Do I want to be / fear being like [my Mum / my Dad etc etc] (Identification or rejection of identification)

What were the bodies of my significant care givers like? Is losing weight losing a connection to / betraying an overweight parent? How else can I maintain that connection? Do I actually really need more separation? Is staying overweight a way of punishing or being deliberately different to a certain person? Why am I angry with them? Can I find another way of expressing that anger and desire to punish (in the first instance this means privately or with a trusted person, not with the person you're angry with). If I weigh less will I be like someone I don't like or am angry with? If I weigh less will I be like a TYPE of person I don't like? What do I think of and how do I feel about so called "slim", "pretty" "young" women? Can I give myself permission in private or with a trusted person to own those feelings and explore them without shame?

- ❖ Did I learn this relationship with food / my body from someone?

What was my parents' relationship with food, dieting, positive body care, exercise. What do I think and how do I feel about the examples that were set for me? Am I willing (or am I willing to be willing!) to have a different relationship with my body and food? How did I feel about my body as a teen / pre-teen? Was I bullied in any way about my appearance? How do I feel about what happened to me? If I could go back in time, as an adult, to a moment when I was being bullied, how would I intervene? What would I say to the child being bullied? To the bullies?

- ❖ How do I feel about other people's bodies?

Do I scrutinise other people's appearance / bodies? Do I "compare and despair"? Do I experience jealousy? Do I take comfort from seeing people who "look worse"? Can I own, without shame and with curiosity, that this is how I have learned to function and to think about others?

- ❖ Is food love?

Was I breast fed? Was food used as part of / a substitute for care and soothing? As a reward? What do I think and how do I feel about that? How else might I show myself love and care and connection? How else can I reward myself especially for hard work? From whom do I get nonsexual physical soothing?

- ❖ Do I need to numb myself?

Do I have difficult feelings that I don't know how to be with or soothe? Is it possible I use food and overeating to comfort myself and numb my emotions? What is it about having feelings that might scare me? Can I start by writing down the kinds of feelings that send me running for food? Can I learn different ways of soothing myself when I'm distressed (check out my other resource on "[Fear](#)" and look particularly at the breathing exercises).

- ❖ Finally, what comes up when I sit quietly refraining from a food acting-out activity once the urge is activated?

(In the words of 12 Step recovery – if you want to find out WHY you do something, try stopping doing it and observe what arises.)

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Part 2: Other regular ways of taking action

- ❖ Learn physical, physiological, emotional and psychological self-soothing strategies – touch, breath work, movement, visualisations, self-talk...
- ❖ Try massage, [cuddle workshops](#), cuddling up with big pillows, non-sexual touch with friends, and learning to give that to yourself, as gentle stroking or squeezing or by using lovely creams.
- ❖ Specifically for your Inner Child – think about the childhood links you made in Part 1. How old were you when your things went wrong? What did that child need? Visualise or get a sense of them, and imagine yourself, someone else safe, your therapist or some kind of powerful being meeting the child's needs.
- ❖ If food has been used as a congratulation or commiseration, brainstorm on alternatives and start to experiment. Especially alternatives that would appeal to the kid in you.
- ❖ For learning to connect with and be in the body – try a daily body mindfulness meditation – Laura Payne's body scan is [here](#) on YouTube.
- ❖ Try a few meetings of the amazing 12 Step fellowship "[Overeaters Anonymous](#)".
- ❖ Work with your therapist on specific aspects of your appearance / parts of your body that you have shame about, experimenting with putting that body part in the chair and dialoguing with it; sit in meditation with that part of the body and see what images, thoughts, feelings arise; or place your hands on a rejected part of the body and speak apology love and gratitude to it.
- ❖ Work with your therapist to process your feelings towards past bullies, the media, care givers and the effects they had on your body image.
- ❖ Get curious about your thoughts and feelings about other people's bodies during your everyday life and decide whether you might like to try relating to and thinking about other people differently. Explore your relationship with other people's bodies in therapy.
- ❖ Collect positive body images on a vision board with words that emphasise health, vitality, self-love and self-belief, rather than ones which reinforce oppressive body-beautiful messages.
- ❖ Consider a period of abstinence from scrutinising yourself in mirrors / reflections.
- ❖ Write, carry around, read self-crafted affirmations around weight, fitness, health and the positive things you want to associate with those ideas.
- ❖ Experiment with walking, running, kick-boxing, and especially DANCING ([including 5Rhythms](#)).

With much love,

